

Congressman Dan Crenshaw (TX-02)
Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee
May 16, 2023

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing. I want to discuss a critical issue for myself and countless other veterans: ensuring our service members living with post-traumatic stress disorder have access to the most effective, innovative treatments available.

After 20 years of war in the Middle East, America's service members are home, but for many the wars they fought are still with them. 27% of post-9/11 Veterans are diagnosed with PTSD. It's the fourth highest service-connected disability of all recipients, with more than 1.2 million veterans receiving compensation for PTSD. There have been more than 800,000 service-connected disability claims related to mental health from the Global War on Terror alone.

The advancements in treatments for PTSD are something to celebrate, but we can't allow that celebration to turn into complacency. We must continue to encourage medical innovation that will help our active-duty service members and veterans, even if it means getting outside our comfort zone.

That is why I am once again pushing for further research into the use of psychedelics to treat PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, and CTE. I am calling on Congress to use this year's NDAA to direct the Secretary of Defense to provide grants for psychedelic research to treat servicemembers living with PTSD, TBI, and CTE. This policy was successfully added as an amendment to the House-passed NDAA last year. It ultimately was not included in the final package that became law, which was disappointing.

Here's why: the studies are very promising. Recent private sector research into the use of MDMA to treat PTSD found that 88% of trial participants had a significant reduction in symptoms and 67% no longer had PTSD.¹ This study is not an outlier. The first trial of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD in 2010 found that 83%

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-021-01336-3>

of the patients given MDMA no longer met the criteria for PTSD, and the follow-up results revealed that the positive effects persisted for years.²

Perhaps more compelling than the data are the personal testimonials you hear from veterans who credit this treatment for saving their lives. People like Marcus Capone and Jonathan Lubecky and countless others who say this treatment turned them away from suicide, rescued their marriage and families, and pulled them out of the depths of despair that only veterans living with PTSD can describe. I have close friends, men I served with on the SEAL teams, who have told me the exact same thing – including a friend on this very committee, Morgan Luttrell, and his brother Marcus.

But here is the issue: Under current law, active-duty service members suffering from PTSD must travel abroad to receive this treatment and risk losing their active-duty status if they do so. That creates two serious problems—First, losing their status means they are taken away from a community and friendship that is integral to their lives – only making the underlying problems worse. They also no longer have the benefits of active-duty status, which will further disrupt their lives and their families. Second, this prevents us from gaining the research we need to determine the true efficacy of psychedelic therapy. We will never understand the extent to which psychedelics can help our servicemembers unless we start doing the necessary testing.

To be clear: This policy would not grant every single servicemember the ability to go out and try psychedelics on their own; it would not provide over-the-counter psychedelics at military pharmacies; it would not even dictate that psychedelics are effective and people with PTSD should seek it out as a treatment option. All this policy would do is direct the Department of Defense to begin the research and allow servicemembers to keep their active-duty status if they participate.

This is a simple but positive step in the right direction. I ask this committee to include this policy in the NDAA so we can truly study this innovative way to treat our service members and give them a chance to continue to serve while taking part in this treatment. They deserve that option and we should not stand in their way. Thank you.

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9710723/#REF9>